

A Nightmare Diary

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A NIGHTMARE DIARY

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To my friends, family, and the thing making in-human screeching noises underneath my floor.

You all inspire me.

I.

Nothing ever happens
in this town
Except
The annual school talent show
and the Christmas light parade
And that time
all the twins disappeared
Nothing ever happens
in this town
Except
When the football team
makes state
Or a new car dealership opens
and everyone gets free hot dogs
and pop corn
and ice cream sandwiches
Or when the wind is just right
and you can hear

low moans and screaming
rising up from the old quarry
late at night
Or when that weird fog
rolls out of the woods
and the rabbits and deer and spiders
glow in the dark for a week or two
after it leaves
Or when the mayor
has too much to drink
and stands outside
the little wooden gate
of the pet cemetery
screaming
Rise up, my children!
But other than that
nothing ever happens
in this town

II.

A little bit about me

Grade: 10

Favorite Color: Rust

Favorite Music: Chanting, Owl screams, K-Pop

Hobbies: Lurking

III.

My school's guidance counselor
(whose name I always forget)
He's okay
I guess
He wears a crimson hood, and stands
just outside my vision
In that dark spot
in the corner
of my eye
I tell him
my darkest secrets
my deepest fears
And about the dreams
You know,
the recurring ones
with all the snakes
He listens and nods
but he never writes anything down
Sometimes, though,

he leaves pamphlets
in my locker
Stuff about eating healthy,
or the benefits of exercise,
or the dangers of texting and driving
Most times
it's just skeletons
of mice
Wrapped in a few scraps
of tattered, red velvet

VI.

Dad is pretty upset
because they closed
the town's only Fudruckers
The one across the street
from the Civil War cemetery
Probably because of all the cats
about 60 of them
They'd come each day, around dusk
sit on the crumbling, mossy stones
and stare in the window at the diners
Then they'd start to howl
The sound was awful

V.

My mother
always says
If you don't have
anything nice
to say
whisper it into
an old bottle.
Bury it
in the woods
and wait
The owls
will take care
of everything

VI.

No school this week
Problems with the plumbing
they said
The toilets and sinks
were overflowing
A horrible smell, wafting
into every classroom
and the teacher's lounge
It took them three days
just to figure out
what caused all the trouble.
The janitors
and men from the city
shining flashlights
into the darkness
of the drainage pipes
It was clowns
Hundreds dead of clowns

Clogging the sewers

VII.

Lecture notes

3rd Period Biology

Topic: Bones

Bones

So many bones

White,

white bones

New bones

Fresh bones

Old bones

Yellowed

and brittle bones

Large

and small bones

Carved bones

Bones

covered

in runes

Listen to them

Listen to the bones

The soft murmur
of the bones

Heed their silent commandments

Obey the bones

VIII.

Snuck out last night
around midnight
and met up with my friends
We walked to the playground
in the park on Oak Street
The one the city closed
when I was very little
We crept through the leaning structures-
all rotting, warped
and splintered wood
The metal of the monkey bars
and jungle gym
rusted and flaking
in the moon's
yellowed light
The swings moving
lazily in the wind
Chains creaking

The sound rising
above calls of the owls
unseen, in the trees
just beyond the fence
Faded police tape
hanging limp and tattered
around the slide
In the 1990's
five children vanished
One-by-one
they climbed the stairs
and waved
and slid
down
Their laughter hanging in the air
as they disappeared
never to come out the other side
Parents and playmates left waiting
with arms open
at the bottom
We brought the Ouija board

and with fingers lightly touching the planchette

We spoke with them

We asked

for news

of the spirit world

What it is like

on "the other side"

Imagine our disappointment

When the letters

spelled out the same message

Over

and over

again

D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-T-O-T-R-A-D-E-P-O-G-

S-?-D-O-Y-O-U-W-A-N-T-

IX.

A note, unsigned
Passed to me today
During 6th period
It reads:
Do you like me?
YES
NO
Check one
Then burn this note
When the ashes cool
Take them to the cemetery
(The one across from Fudruckers)
Scatter them in a circle around you
Then whisper your name
to the crows
perched atop the stones
They will bring me your answer
I'll be waiting.

X.

That weird kid
sat next to me
at lunch today
The one with the really chapped lips
who's always staring at his hands
and mumbling
He hasn't been the same
since he went into the photo booth
at the mall
You know,
the one that mysteriously appeared
next to the Corn Dog Hut
We dared him to go in
He sat and pulled
the curtain shut
Unseen quarters rattled
I remember the sound it made
The rhythmic grinding

of metal on rusted metal
It got louder
and louder
and louder
Then there was a blinding light
bright, nauseous neon green
pulsing from inside
By the time mall security arrived
his voice had already given out
from all the screaming
His eyes were empty
His hair was white
Today I asked him
what he saw in there
He didn't look up
He just smiled
His flaking lips began to bleed
He started laughing
and laughing
and laughing

XI.

Everyone at school knows
to stay away
from the Janitor's Closet
The door
heavy,
steel,
dented
Olive green paint, chipped
flakes falling to the linoleum floor
like the scales of some great serpent
Get too close
and it fills your skull
with this buzzing sound
A noise
that makes your stomach churn
and your teeth ache
Once
I tried to open it

to peek inside
My shaking hand
closed
on the knob
It was warm
and throbbing
like a beating heart

I tried to pull away
but I couldn't

I opened my mouth to scream
but the voice that came out
was not my own
It was ancient
dust-choked
and laughing
I hunger!

It boomed

Oh child, how I hunger!

XII.

From: The office of the principal

To: The parent/s of XXXXXXX XXXXXXX

Re: Suspension

Mr. and Mrs. XXXXXXXXX,

This note is to inform you that your child, XXXXXXX, is suspended from school for the next seven days.

XXXXXXX was sent to my office for the following violations of the student code of conduct: 2.051C or “causing a disruptive learning environment” and school policy 2.062C or “destruction of school-owned property”.

According to a detailed incident report from your child’s instructor, Mr. Bellevue, XXXXXXXX repeatedly interrupted his first period chemistry class when “some strange and unseen force” began violently throwing books, test tubes, beakers and other lab equipment around the room.

Multiple verbal warnings issued by Mr. Bellevue were ignored by **XXXXXX**, who did not answer, but responded by loudly chanting in an “odd and probably Aramaic” language while objects continued to fly about the classroom and a “viscous green fluid” began dripping down the walls.

Please sign and date below to acknowledge that you received notice of you child’s suspension and return it to my office at as soon as possible.

Please be aware that you will be billed for all damaged school property, equipment and any clean up of ectoplasmic residue.

PARENT _____ SIGNA-
TURE _____

*I am **so** grounded...*

XIII.

Everyone in town

just loves

Applebee's

Mostly they love

the mysterious lights

inside the Applebee's

Emerald green, dark blue

brilliant shades

of red and gold

Pulsing, wavering,

small tongues of flame

they hang, suspended in the air

Above the patrons as they wait

for orders of Bloomin' Onions

and fried mozzarella sticks

People line up for hours

just to get inside

and stare

Sitting in booths
lost in visions
Inside the lights, they see
worlds beyond worlds
beyond worlds
Countless realities
created and destroyed
in an infinite loop
They watch
speechless
Tears of rapture
streaming down
awestruck faces
And landing,
popping and sizzling
into their Fiesta Fajita Skillets

XIV.

An announcement from the principal
crackled over the intercom
in class this afternoon
Students,
Our school
has been asked to host
a Foreign Exchange Student
We must be vigilant
and watch for signs of His coming
Upticks in sunspot activity
sudden, unexplained crop failure
and an increased aggressiveness
in local bee colonies
We know not the day
nor the hour
when He will arrive
Who knows,
the Foreign Exchange Student

may already be here
walking among us
Look at your fellow classmates
Do they have smooth
lineless palms?
And eyes, amber- colored
flecked with crimson
when the light hits them just right?
Have they ceased to speak?
instead communicating
by tracing strange glyphs
in the air with their hands?
Report them to school officials
immediately
Do not
confront
the Foreign Exchange Student
Do Not
trade lunch items with
the Foreign Exchange Student
Do Not

accept crude, obsidian totems from
the Foreign Exchange Student
With your cooperation,
we may yet survive

XV.

One of the cemetery cats
followed me home from school
A little back one
with green eyes
Mewling and weaving
between my ankles
I should have shooed it away
But it was *so* cute
and *so* thin
So I scratched its head
and left some milk out on the porch
Later
at dinner
The palms of my hands
started bleeding
My feet
too
The crimson warmth

soaking through my sneakers

What

a mess

Now the carpet is ruined

and I'm grounded

No internet

for a week

Stupid cat

XVI.

Everyone *hates*

Susie Weaver

She always wins
the annual school talent show

Every

Single

Year

She walks on stage, curtsies,

then her eyes roll back

and she falls to the floor

Where she writhes, and spasms

and shrieks

Fires!

Floods, earthquakes...death!

Our crops will die!

Our cattle will starve!

All that we know,

all that we love,

will be ashes!

What a show off

XVII.

Note to self

Don't bother asking
Why all the twins in town
suddenly disappeared
The adults just laugh,
and say they don't know
what you are talking about
All the while
their nervous eyes
dart
In the direction
of the woods

XVIII.

It's take your kid to work day, again
Feel like I'm kind of getting too old for this, but
you get the day off school
I wake up early
before the sun is up
And the morning's early fog
still hangs over the town
I rub the sleep from my eyes
and climb into dad's old truck
Dozing lightly as we head across town to his office
I walk through the doors
and give the same polite smile
and wave
To the woman
in the front office
As she sips her strong
earthy smelling coffee
From the same
cracked mug

With the same too-red lipstick smudge
in the same place on its rim
The banal ritual
ending each year
With her saying
the same four words
My, how you've grown
We walk
through the office
Past the cubicles
where men in starched, collared shirts
and ties sit hunched and muttering
into their phones
Their fingers skitter
like gnarled albino spiders
across dingy keyboards
Down the hallway with worn carpet
with its faded, dizzying patterns
Past the copy machine
as it shutters and jerks
and spews sick, green light

across the room
Past the break room
and the fridge's buzzing drone
and the low, liquid gurgle
of the coffee pot
To a little closet in the back,
where he dons a robe
Long and black
lined with crimson trim
He straightens the medallion that hangs around
neck
And runs his fingers
over the words carved deep
into the gleaming bronze,
They read: *Assistant Manager*

Then it's out the back door
and across an empty field
We wade through the dry and brittle weeds
that claw at our knees

Into the woods
past the tree line
In the shade
of the twisted branches
Shrouded
by their layered shadows
The hard crunch
of grey earth
beneath our feet
I see my friends
and classmates
in the clearing
I join them,
ready to begin the day's work
Our parents watch
nodding in approval
from beneath their hoods
My father clears his throat,
and says to us
as he does every year
Well what are you all waiting for?

*Those obelisks
aren't going
to unearth
themselves*

XIX.

Brushing my teeth before bed

I heard a voice

coming from the drain

Rising up

as the water

swirled down

Whispering,

It said,

Today a widow sat and read aloud

a poem to an empty room

Today the walls

of an old stone church collapsed

burying faithful congregants alive

beneath its holy rubble.

Today the chef at Henry J. Clifford Middle School

cut his finger while chopping carrots

Today the earth beneath an ancient jungle temple

opened like a jagged, angry mouth

and vomited up cursed gold

*and skeletons adorned in royal rags
Today a child was born,
naked and pink and screaming
destined for an unknown future
Today your mother
cooked taco salad casserole
for dinner
again
Today a pack of feral dogs
emerged from a green mist
to terrorize the residents
of several small Midwestern farms
Today it rained toads in Nacogdoches
Today something massive and nameless
slumbering in the velvet dark
between realities
stirred
It opened an eye
red-rimed
and full of madness
A knock on the door*

My mother

She asks

what is taking so long

I turn to leave the bathroom

Tomorrow

croaked the voice from the drain

It will blink



About the Author

Chris McGuinness is a writer and poet. He lives in Belton, Texas.

